

VZCZCXRO4131
PP RUEHIK
DE RUEHIK #0083/01 3232239
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 182239Z NOV 08
FM AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0400
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY 0294
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHIK/AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI 0442

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THESSALONIKI 000083

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DS/DSS/OSAC, DS/ICI/PII, DS/OP/EUR, EUR/SE, EUR/EX

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: THESSALONIKI: ANNUAL NOVEMBER 17 DEMONSTRATION CONTINUES
PEACEFUL TREND AS AUTHORITIES STAND UP TO ANARCHISTS

REF: THESSALONIKI 64

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Polytechnic students' uprising against the military junta in Greece, two peaceful demonstrations took place in downtown Thessaloniki on Monday November 17, 2008. The absence of serious violence continues a trend in recent years of more robust police presence and willingness of university officials to confront self-styled anarchists who exploit the campus' traditional "asylum" status. A senior university administrator told post that anarchist groups are toning down violence in order to preserve their once-unchallenged access to the campus, where they can avoid police and carry out a range of illegal activities. There were no injuries and no arrests. END SUMMARY

LOCAL AUTHORITIES COOPERATE TO DISCOURAGE VIOLENCE

¶2. (U) At 17:00 on November 17, approximately 8,000 demonstrators in two groups, including members of the (PAME) Labor Union, Communist party (KKE), Left wing parties, Reformed communists (SYN), students, teachers and a group of the "anti-dominant movement" gathered in front of the Polytechnic School at the Aristotle University campus and marched with banners through the city's main streets. The two groups passed by the Consulate about 30 minutes apart (18:30 and 19:00 hours.) Each remained for about 10 minutes shouting anti-American slogans (e.g. "Americans, Killers of the People;" "The greatest hide-out for terrorists is the American Embassy;" "Polytechnic is Alive, Keep Americans Out;" "Imperialism is the enemy;" "They've killed Lambraki-Bologianni Killers of the People Americans"). Both groups departed peacefully and returned to the university campus from where they dispersed without causing any serious problems.

¶3. (U) The Consulate closed at 15:00 as a precaution and there were no incidents outside the Consulate building. The police were well prepared and protected the Consulate building effectively. Three police divisions were deployed around the building and two police buses with a fire brigade closed off the street in back of the Consulate. The main entrance of the building was closed by a large roll down metal gate. Local TV crews covered the event. Police reported that there were no arrests and no injuries during the demonstrations. (Note: During the 2007 November 17 demonstrations there were some 5000 demonstrators, one arrest, no injuries. End note) Smaller peaceful demonstrations took place in many Northern Greece cities.

¶4. (U) Unlike in past years, demonstrators refrained (for the second consecutive year) from breaking store windows, throwing Molotov cocktails and clashing with police. Post contacts attribute the decline in violence to an increasingly robust police presence and the willingness of prosecutors and Aristotle

University officials to challenge self-styled anarchists who exploit the campus "asylum" status. In the past, anarchists often threw Molotov cocktails at police, then hid on campus, which has traditionally been off-limits to police. Recently, prosecutors have declared that such violence is a felony and therefore justifies hot pursuit by police on campus. University officials, who have traditionally resisted police entry on campus under any circumstances, have in the past two years openly accepted the right of police to enter the campus in pursuit of violent anarchists.

ANARCHISTS POLICING THEMSELVES TO PROTECT CAMPUS ASYLUM?

15. (SBU) A senior University official told us on November 18 that so-called anarchists have taken note of the hardened stance of local authorities and begun to restrain themselves in order not to invite a more general police crackdown on their activities. According to the official, the anarchists have for many years sold narcotics and pursued a range of other illegal crimes on campus, without fear of police intervention. He claimed that during this year's November 17 demonstrations, one group of anarchists stopped another, smaller group of anarchists from throwing Molotov cocktails on the edge of the University so as not to provoke police into entering their campus "safe-haven."

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The second consecutive year of generally peaceful demonstrations to mark the anniversary of November 17 reflects continued progress by local authorities against violent anarchists. Good police preparation and cooperation between the police, the District Attorney's office and University officials contributed to the peaceful outcome. Reports that anarchists may be restraining themselves, albeit for the wrong reasons, are also encouraging (if true). A recent spate of arson attacks and

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other acts of vandalism against ATMs, banks, party offices and other public facilities in Thessaloniki unconnected to the November 17 demonstrations underscores, however, that police have more work ahead. END COMMENT
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